TL1329-27

Extract from the

WEEKLY HOUSE HANSARD

Parliamentary Database

EAST TIMOR
Motion

Query: **Speaker = Gibson* and East Timor**

Article: **4 of 5**

Date: 27 November 1991 Page: 3463

Speech in the context of Miscellaneous

Speaker: Gibson Mr G.D.

Electorate: MORETON
Party: ALP
Government: YES

Interjectors: FERGUSON

EAST TIMOR
Motion

Mr GIBSON (Moreton) (9.42 p.m.)--I move:

That this House:

(1) expresses its deepest sympathy to the people of East Timor for the appalling tragedy they experienced with the Dili massacre of 12 November 1991;

(2) condemns in the strongest terms the resort by the Indonesian military to force which on every account was wholly excessive;

(3) regards as deeply repugnant the reported comments of the Indonesian Commander-in-Chief on the day following the massacre that the "disruptors . . . had to be shot";

(4) notes the Indonesian Government's decision to establish a National Commission of Investigation to investigate all aspects of the massacre, and calls upon it to take every necessary step to ensure to the satisfaction of both the East Timorese and international communities:

(a) that the inquiry is "free, accurate, just and thorough", as promised;

(b) that it is conducted fairly and impartially, with all witnesses guaranteed protection against intimidation or retaliation; and

(c) that appropriate action is taken against those found to be responsible for unlawful or excessive acts;

(5) further calls upon the Indonesian Government:

(a) to provide immediate access by humanitarian and aid groups, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross, to those wounded or detained as a result of the events of 12 November and other recent incidents in East Timor, without any prejudice to those so visited;

(b) to respond promptly to requests for information in relation to detained or missing persons about whom concern has been expressed following the events of 12 November and other recent incidents;

(c) to release all political prisoners detained because of their opposition to the integration of East Timor with Indonesia; and

(d) to guarantee that individuals who express peaceful opposition to the integration of East Timor with Indonesia are free from intimidation, harassment or detention;

(6) requests the Government to instruct the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia to make an early visit, and subsequently regular visits, to East Timor to report fully on all aspects of the present situation and the progress of the National Commission of Investigation;

(7) requests the Australian Government, having regard to the full range of its policies toward and bilateral contacts with Indonesia, to give consideration to the steps which it might take to review these policies and contacts in the event that the Indonesian investigation and follow-up action is unsatisfactory, for example the suspension of military training programs;

(8) notes the importance of any Australian Government response to the 12 November massacre not only reflecting the deep concern of the wider Australian community but also being consistent with Australia's own national interests and above all with the interests and welfare of the East Timorese people;

(9) calls, accordingly, upon the Government to explore all possible constructive avenues for:

(a) guaranteeing the effectiveness of the investigation process and its follow-up;

(b) achieving a peaceful resolution of the on-going conflict, including by requesting the Indonesian Government, in the Prime Minister's words, to "sit down with the people of East Timor including the resistance forces and try and work out a program of achieving peaceable relations"; and

(c) meeting the longer-term needs and aspirations of the East Timorese people; and

(10) in particular in these respects, requests that:

(a) the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade make an early visit to Indonesia to discuss all aspects of the East Timor situation, including the events of 12 November and options for effective longer-term reconciliation;

(b) active steps be taken to explore the role which might now be played, with wide international support, by the United Nations and its Secretary-General;

(c) strong support be given to the role of the International Commission of the Red Cross in protecting and promoting human rights in East Timor, through continued representations to the Indonesian authorities and if possible targeted financial assistance; and

(d) approval be sought for the establishment of a resident Australian Consulate in Dili.

Much has been written and said in the last two weeks about the massacre that occurred in Dili on 12 November. There will be many more strong expressions of anger, condemnation, sympathy, regret and desire for change made this evening in this debate by honourable members on both sides. This is the

first occasion in more than a decade on which the Australian Parliament has debated our nation's policy and actions on East Timor. There have been other occasions on which speakers have discussed East Timor or made some reference to it, such as during the debate on Australia's involvement in the Gulf war, but this is the first occasion for many years on which this House has been able to express its opinion on our policy towards the annexation and control of East Timor by Indonesia.

It is no secret that there is a widely held view in the Australian community, in my political Party and in all parties, and in this Parliament, that the actions of successive Australian governments in respect of East Timor have been wrong. I share that view, as I have stated on previous occasions in this House. It is an undeniable fact that the policies of the past 16 years of both the Indonesian Government and the Australian Government on East Timor have been failures in regard to their treatment of the people of East Timor and must change.

The Indonesians believe that their use of brutal repression, of military offensives, of mass executions, of intimidation and harassment, of destruction of villages and uprooting of thousands of people, of beatings, torture and detention would lead to their ultimate victory over the people and the territory.

The Indonesians may have control over most of the land area of East Timor, but recent events confirm once more that they will never have victory over the hearts and minds of the East Timorese people. Australia's tacit acceptance of the Indonesian occupation, our failure to act upon the continual flood of reports of brutality and repression, our recognition of the clearly illegal act of annexation, and our active participation in negotiations to exploit natural resources in the adjacent area have been at the expense of over 200,000 East Timorese slaughtered by Indonesia.

Our policies make us clearly culpable in this latest massacre. The blood of the 75 who died on 12 November and the blood of the many thousands before them is also on our hands, as it is on the hands of the Indonesians. We have reached the point where we can no longer ignore the stark contrasts in our foreign policy agenda. The motion before the House is the start of a process whereby our nation can restore some honesty and credibility in our relations with Indonesia by actively working for a just and lasting peaceful future for the East Timorese. It will not be good enough for us to simply express regret, sympathy and concern and then let the issue fade into obscurity again, as it did a decade ago. We in this Parliament, as representatives of our nation, must seek a positive resolution of this matter.

I recognise that the only realistic way we can address the matter is to work with the Indonesian Government. Despite all the temptations to strike back hard and react in the strongest way that governments and nations can, that will not achieve anything for the East Timorese people. It may make us feel good that we really showed them what we thought, but the trauma of life for the East Timorese will continue unabated. What is clear is that there have been significant advances in the attitude of the Indonesian Government. I share the opinion of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Senator Gareth Evans) that this massacre was not ordered by the Government in Jakarta. It is also clear that if Indonesia had not had tens of thousands of its troops present throughout East Timor, if it had not been engaged in a three-month process of harassment and intimidation leading up to the proposed Portuguese parliamentary delegation's visit, and if it had not allowed the military such a free rein in its activities, the funeral procession would not have occurred, the demonstration would not have occurred and the massacre would not necessarily have taken place.

Many in the Indonesian Government and in its Parliament have found this tragedy as repugnant as we have, but there are others, including the hardline senior military in Indonesia, who would have a different view. That is reflected by what I describe as the obscene remarks of General Try Sutrisno. But, for the first time, we have a situation where the Indonesian Government has responded to international pressure--including Australia's -- and established a full inquiry into the actions of its military. This is a considerable advance on previous responses. Many people are sceptical about the independence and composition of this national commission of investigation. The flow of reports of continuing round-ups, detentions and possible execution of witnesses and participants in the 12 November march demonstrates that the local military forces in East Timor do not want the inquiry to succeed.

It is unlikely that the East Timorese will have any confidence in the inquiry and will be unwilling to risk more lives by coming forward to give evidence. That is why the parts of this motion dealing with the conduct of the inquiry, parts (4) and (5), are vitally important issues which must be taken up as a matter of urgency by the Australian Government in our discussions with the Indonesian Government. Indonesia must bring its military forces into line and cease the intimidation, harassment and detention of residents. It must free all political prisoners and it must guarantee the protection of witnesses.

If the Australian community is to have any respect for the work and findings of this inquiry, we need to have our own independent assessment of its operations. The Australian Embassy should ensure that an observer is present throughout the inquiry. We should also seek as a fundamental condition that the United Nations Secretary-General send one of his representatives to Indonesia to also monitor the conduct of the inquiry. That will ensure that the whole international community is kept informed. These are not unreasonable or unrealistic requests. They are fundamental requirements if the Indonesian inquiry is to achieve any credibility or respect.

It is in clauses 8, 9 and 10 that this motion seeks a positive change of direction in Australia's response to the continuing tragedy of East Timor. The Prime Minister (Mr Hawke) in his first response to the 12 November massacre called on the Indonesian Government to recognise that its administrative policies had failed and that the time had come for it to `sit down with the people of East Timor, including the resistance forces, and try to work out a program of achieving peaceable relations'. He reaffirmed that position today in answer to a question in Question Time.

It is a fundamental fact of life that, in almost all confrontations, battles or conflicts, a final resolution will be reached only when the participants in the struggle actually sit down and negotiate. The tragedy is in the length of time it often takes before combatants realise this inevitability and in the bloodshed and loss of life that are the result of their arrogance, stubbornness and futility. Such is the case in East Timor. Two hundred thousand people have now died. But the protests continue, the fighting continues and the determination to resist Indonesian occupation is stronger than ever.

The Indonesian Government is trying to build a vibrant economy and improve the living standards and income of the people throughout its nation. It seeks to take an active role in regional, economic, political and security issues. These are admirable objectives which should be supported and encouraged. But the big negative in this scenario is the heavy-handed methods that it utilises to stifle criticism and expression of opinion. This is highlighted in cold, stark detail with brutal reality in its control of East Timor. It is in Indonesia's best interests to have the East Timor issue peacefully resolved so that it can achieve its objectives elsewhere in its nation. If it does so, it will result in an improved reputation internationally and considerable increases in economic aid and development.

Australia does have a unique and important opportunity to take an active role to assist in the achievement of a peaceful resolution. We have worked hard to develop a mature relationship with the Indonesian Government over the past decade. This was highlighted by the cooperation which was evidenced in the work of Australia and Indonesia in achieving a peace settlement in Cambodia.

The proposal for a visit to Indonesia by our Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade is an important component of the process of convincing the Indonesians that their best interests will be served by working positively for a peaceful resolution. But it is clear that Australia alone cannot achieve such a result. The United Nations has a vital role to play and we must use all available avenues to have it, particularly through the good offices of the Secretary-General, actively involved.

When I participated in an international parliamentary delegation to speak with the UN Secretary-General in March of this year, our delegation was given very strong commitments about the determination of the Secretary-General to achieve a just and lasting peace for East Timor. The UN is still committed to enabling the people of East Timor to choose for themselves what their future should be--and I share that commitment. There are many ways in which the UN can facilitate a process of talks between the Indonesian Government and the representatives of the people of East Timor.

The motion before the House requests the

Government to explore all such avenues. It is a matter of some disappointment to me that the Opposition is proposing, by way of amendment, the deletion of those parts of this motion which request our Government to work for a positive future for East Timor. I do not understand this action, as I know that many honourable members opposite share my desire for our country to work for peace in East Timor.

Another significant initiative contained in the motion is the call for the establishment of an Australian consulate in Dili. This would provide for ongoing participation by Australia in the cause for peace. It will enable us to monitor the situation and provide some protection for the East Timorese. It is supported by the people of East Timor and by the Governor of East Timor, as during the visit of the Australian parliamentary delegation to East Timor in February this year he asked us to convey such a request to our Government.

This motion is an important statement which gives a clear direction for the future to Indonesia, Australia and East Timor. It puts both governments on notice that the people of Australia, and in fact people throughout the world, will not tolerate any further massacres. We will not accept a whitewash of the events of 12 November and we want those responsible brought to justice. But, above all, this motion states clearly that the people of East Timor deserve a much better future than they have had a past for the last 16 years. It is time for Australia to assume a more active role and to correct the impressions of our past policies. Above all, the killing must end, the abuse of human rights must end, and the lies and deceit must end. The people of Australia demand, and will accept, nothing less.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)--Is the motion seconded?

Mr Ferguson--I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.